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U.S. watched, listed gays in three decades

Washington (Reuter)—The federal government routinely spied on organizations promoting gay rights and compiled voluminous lists of homosexuals in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, according to FBI and Pentagon documents.

An FBI spokesman would not comment directly on the documents but said the bureau automatically turned in federal employees discovered to be homosexual on grounds that they might pose a security risk.

The documents, released under the Freedom of Information Act and obtained by Reuter from a private source, underscore a concern in the intelligence community that homosexuals may pose a risk to national security.

Soviet intelligence agents routinely cruise gay bars seeking candidates for blackmail who could be coopted as spies, a spokesman for the CIA, another agency which is concerned about possible espionage, said.

Former CIA official Victor Marchetti said in a separate interview that the United States employed similar techniques not only against Communists but in order to extract information from officials of allied governments who were "closet" homosexuals.

The CIA declined to comment on Mr. Marchetti's statement.

The documents show considerable surveillance of gay rights organizations took place in San Francisco, which has a large homosexual population, but FBI agents across the country were involved.

According to the documents, the FBI spied for years on the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Billitis, two gay rights groups, and was concerned that they had been infiltrated by Communists.

Spokesmen for both rights groups denied there had been any such infiltration.

FBI spokesman Lane Bonner said he would not comment on the documents, adding that surveillance of the sort revealed in them was ended in the mid-1970s under rules that require

But two members of Congress familiar with the documents have sharply criticized the FBI.

"The Orwellian nature of this conduct revives the frightening specter of the McCarthy witch-hunt era of the 1950s," said Representative Phillip Burton, a California Democrat, in a letter asking for an investigation by Congress.

"[The FBI] appears to have subverted the Constitution," Representative Henry Waxman, also a California Democrat, charged in a similar letter.

Among the documents is a December, 1965, memorandum from the late FBI director J. Edgar Hoover entitled "Homosexual Hangouts Throughout the United States."

It instructs agents to obtain a copy of "The Address Book," a publication that lists such hangouts, "in order to conduct thorough interviews and for use in getting ... leads."

Another document says a 53-page list of homosexuals and of those "identified as having homosexual tendencies [or] as associates of homosexuals" had been added to the files

in the San Francisco FBI office.

One document describes a ruse FBI agents used to gain admission to the Mattachine Society offices in San Francisco for purposes of spying: "Pretext: searching for an office that was in fact on the fourth floor."

The document then describes the premises and notes that "four men were observed in the offices, all obviously homosexual."

In other documents, agents provide descriptions of men who attended a gay rights rally in 1966. One reads: "White, male, 35, five-foot-10, 150 pounds, carrying sign stating, 'I served honorably.'"

One agent reports on surveillance in 1962 of a "leather store" for homosexuals called Cloak and Dagger: "Agents observed that various items of leather clothing were displayed ... and concluded that the store catered to a masochistic clientele."

Other documents describe "Project 220" in which the Army obtained names of those arrested on homosexual offenses from local police: "Reports on individuals of obvious interest to the Department of Defense are marked with red tabs."

There are also many files of indexed newspaper clippings about homosexuals, including articles about an alleged "homosexual ring" in Ronald Reagan's gubernatorial administration in California.

In addition to concern about possible security risks, the documents referred to an investigation designed to prevent the blackmail of closeted homosexuals by common criminals. The probe was codenamed Homex (for "Homosexual Extortion").

The document describes a program to prevent extortion by compiling lists and photographs of potential victims, who are code-named "Baby Dolls."

It defines a Baby Doll as "a victim who exhibits a real fear of being caught and exposed" and urges

agents to develop such people as informants.

An FBI spokesman said the Homex program, which continued until the late 1970s, was not intended to spy on homosexuals but rather to protect them. He said Homex had resulted in the conviction of a number of would-be extortionists.

But Mr. Waxman, in his letter denouncing the FBI, charged that "efforts ostensibly to protect individuals from blackmail have created a form of government extortion."

An aide to the congressman said he meant that FBI agents were coercing the names of other secret homosexuals from certain of the Baby Dolls.

Whether homosexuals in government actually pose a security risk has long been a matter of dispute. The CIA and some ex-agents such as Mr. Marchetti maintain the risk is high.